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IV. RESEARCH NEWS, PROJECTS, AND REPORTS

***PROJECT: DISTRIBUTION OF PLANTING RITUALS AND PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF MAIZE IN THE HIMALAYAS**

Researchers: Professor Carl L. Johannessen and Anne Z. Parker
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Sponsored by: National Science Foundation

This research project has commenced during the summer of 1985 with a survey of primitive maize in Bhutan and will continue with field work in Assam, Sikkim and E. Nepal in 1986. Field and historical data suggest possible pre-1500 AD introduction of maize and other New World crops into the Himalayan region. Research continues to document clearly, by as many kinds of evidence as is possible, the history of interchange of New and Old World crops especially in S. Asia and the Himalayan region.

***PROJECT: TRANSLITERATING, EDITING, RECORDING AND PUBLISHING BUDDHIST SANSKRIT MANTRAS**

Researcher: Deepak Shimkhada

Funded by: Buddhist Association of the United States

This project is one product of my long association with Mr. Shi pei Lai, who sought to pronounce Buddhist mantras in Sanskrit. As a practising Buddhist from Taiwan, Mr. Lai had been reciting Buddhist mantras in Chinese which were originally written in Sanskrit. When subjected to the same mantra--one in Chinese and the other in Sanskrit, Mr. Lai responded more deeply to Sanskrit than to Chinese. In a state of trance, every part of Mr. Lai's body shook and vibrated, showing a higher level of consciousness which was due in part to the Sanskrit mantras. A half a dozen other subjects, all Buddhists of Taiwanese origin, were subjected to the same test, and they, too, responded to the Sanskrit mantras in a similar fashion. Based on the above test coupled with the prevailing belief that Sanskrit mantras are purer and thus are more efficacious than the same mantra in other languages, I came to the conclusion that mantras, when recited in their original Sanskrit, are more powerful for the believer of the faith.

It is commonly held that a mantra must be recited in its original language. The original language in which the Buddhist mantras are written is Sanskrit, for Sanskrit is considered holy--the language of the gods. The Mahayana Buddhist tradition, like its Hindu counterpart, needless to say, places utmost importance on reciting mantras in Sanskrit, both accurately and correctly, so that they may be potent and efficacious for the practitioner.

Mantras are collections of mystic syllables or words in praise of a particular deity. In any case, they are believed to contain great power. For example, Vajrayanists believe that there is nothing impossible for the mantras to achieve if they are perused accurately and correctly. Beyontosh Bhattacharya, in his famous work, The Indian Buddhist Iconography, writes, "Through repeated mutterings of the Mantras such power is generated that it can astonish the whole world." Indeed, there have lived in the past many great and famous Buddhist monks and siddhas who were known for their mystic powers. Many outstanding feats have been attributed to them. All of those mystics are believed to have used one thing--the mantra.

The value of the mantra, besides extolling the divine nature of the deity to which the mantra is dedicated, is in the choice of the words which produce certain sounds that affect the reciter. Thus, there is reason to suggest that there exists a relationship between the person and the sounds the words produce. In other words, sound, if used in a controlled situation, could alter one's behavior. It is very important, therefore, that the mantras be recited with proper pronunciations in original Sanskrit in order to achieve the most effective result.

The present project is undertaken with this in mind. The primary literature to be considered in the project is sutras collected in the five volume work of the Grand Buddhist Tripitaka, the Ta Chang Ch'ing edition, which is based on the following texts or works: The "Three Editions" of the Sung, the Yuan, and the Ming Dynasties, namely, the Sung edition of A.D. 1239, the Yuan edition of A.D. 1290, and the Ming edition of A.D. 1601. In addition, the Kao-Li edition of A.D. 1175, the Tempyo MSS. of A.D. 629, the Chinese MSS. of the Sui (A.D. 581-617) and the T'ang (A.D. 618-822) Dynasties belonging to the Imperial Treasure House Shoso-in at Nara, otherwise called Shogo-zo. The old Sung edition (A.D. 1104-1148) belonging to the Library of the Imperial Household. The Tempyo MSS. of the monasteries Daitoku-ji, Montaku-ji, Ishiyama-ji, Chion-in, Todai-ji, and Daigo-ji. The Ninaji MSS. by Kukai. The Nakamura MSS. from Tun-huang. The Kongo-zo MSS. of Toji; the Koyasan edition, C.A.D. 1250.

The project will be divided into three stages. The first stage will deal with transliteration and editing. Mantras written in Roman letters will be transliterated into Devanagari, and those mantras that have been abraded due to bad printing and old age will be edited. In the second stage the mantras will be recorded on cassette tapes, and finally the compiled transliterations will be published with corresponding mudras. All of this will help, it is hoped, to preserve the Buddhist mantras and to perpetuate their correct pronunciation in the original Sanskrit.

